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PHASES OF THE CIVIL WAR

AN APPRECIATION AND CRITICISM OF
MR. JAMES FORD RHODES'S
FIFTH VOLUME

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SOME PHASES OF THE CIVIL WAR.

THIS volume covers the twenty-one momentous and ever memorable months between December, 1864, and August, 1866. Not a few of those who read the narrative themselves bore a part, subordinate, perhaps, but still a part, in the vast military and naval operations therein described; and, when the war drums ceased to beat and the battle-flags were furled, they were deeply interested in the subsequent political agitation. Passing their own recollections in review, they have thus lived to hearken to the verdict of the historian.

Based on the careful study of a vast mass of material, patiently gathered and judicially considered, Mr. Rhodes's book is literary in tone and calm in spirit, — a thoroughly good piece of up-to-date historical work. The significance of the period dealt with will, moreover, only increase with the lapse of time, and to its history this volume is a contribution of lasting value. If for no other reason, it will so prove from the fact that it is not to such a degree removed from the time of which it treats as to cease to be contemporaneous. He who writes has in this case shared in the intensity of that of which he writes; with his own eyes he has seen many of the actors in the events of which he tells, and his ears have drunk in their own descriptive words. How great an advantage this may prove to one competent to avail himself of it has been shown more recently by Clarendon and Thiers, as in the classic times by Tacitus and Thucydides. What is more, the judgments now rendered by Mr. Rhodes, as to both men and events, based on an exhaustive study of material, are not only cautiously reached but they are expressed in measured terms, quite devoid of either zeal or preconception. Neither a parti-

san nor a theorist, Mr. Rhodes is nothing unless critical. It is, therefore, not unsafe even now to predict that his conclusions will prove in essentials in harmony with the ultimate verdict. Nor is this something to be lightly said; for the events and men of the period of Gettysburg and Emancipation will be studied and weighed not less closely by the historians and historical investigators of the twenty-third century than were those of the Naseby and Commonwealth period by Masson, by Carlyle, by Macaulay and by Gardiner in the century we recently closed.

But, in writing history, especially the narrative of events still to a large extent contemporaneous, much necessarily depends on the point of view. The direction of approach involves, indeed, nothing less than the question of perspective, — the relative proportion of parts. On these, in turn, depend to some extent the conclusions reached.

Mr. Rhodes approaches his subject in a general way. Neither a politician nor a soldier, he is as unskilled in practical diplomacy as he is innocent of any study of international law; nor can he be classed as a publicist. Once, indeed, a man of affairs, he is now a judicially minded general investigator, bringing much hard common-sense to bear, always modestly, on the complex problems of a troubled and eventful period. Now it so chances that as a participant in the earlier time, and, more recently, through the study of historical material as yet unpublished, I have looked upon the same problems from other points of view. In what I now have to say, therefore, I propose to discuss, in a spirit of criticism wholly friendly, what from those points of view seem to me deficiencies and shortcomings in Mr. Rhodes's treatment. They will prove not inconsiderable. Indeed, they go, in my judgment, to the heart of the mystery.

At the close of his summary of the war, in that chapter devoted to a consideration of the internal affairs of the Confederacy during the struggle, Mr. Rhodes suggests a query which many others have often put to themselves, and over which, first and last, they have pondered much. Tersely stated, it is this: How was it that we succeeded in overcoming the seceded States? A task truly Titanic! — and, looking back now through a vista of more than forty years, one still instinctively asks — How did we ever accomplish it?

Seeking an answer to this far from self-explanatory query, Mr. Rhodes says: "A certain class of facts, if considered alone, can make us wonder how it was possible to subjugate the Confederates. It could not have been accomplished without great political capacity at the head of the Northern government, and a sturdy support of Lincoln by the Northern people."¹ This, I submit, is an inadequate answer to a perplexing question, — a question which goes to the heart of any correct historical treatment of our Great Rebellion, to adopt Clarendon's title. Surely it goes without saying that to overcome a combination of numbers, resources and territory such as that composing the Southern Confederacy implied great political capacity in the overcoming power, and the sturdy popular support of him upon whom the task devolved. As Shakespeare causes Horatio to observe in another connection, "There needs no ghost come from the grave to tell us this." But the question suggested by Mr. Rhodes cannot, I submit, being one of a very perplexing character, satisfactorily be disposed of by generalities. To formulate an answer at once definite and satisfactory, we must, descending to particulars, be more specific.

The usual and altogether conventional explanation given is the immense preponderance of strength and resources — men and material — enjoyed by one of the two contending parties. The census and the statistics of the War Department are then appealed to, and figures are arrayed setting forth the relative population and wealth, — the resources, manufactures and fighting strength of the two sides. As the result of such a showing, a certain amount of astonishment is finally expressed that the Confederacy ever challenged a conflict; and the conclusion reached is that, under all the circumstances, the only real cause for wonder is that such an unequal contest was so long sustained.

But this answer to the question will hardly bear examination. After the event it looks well, — has a plausible aspect; but in 1861 a census had just been taken, and every fact and figure now open to study was then patent. The South knew them, Europe knew them; and yet in the spring of 1861, and from Bull Run in July of that year to Gettysburg and Vicksburg in 1863, no unprejudiced observer anywhere believed

¹ Vol. v. p. 481.

that the subjugation of the Confederacy and the restoration of the old Union were reasonably probable, or, indeed, humanly speaking, a possibility. Mr. Gladstone, a man wise in his generation, and as a contemporaneous observer not unfriendly to the Union side, only expressed the commonly received and apparently justified opinion of all unprejudiced on-lookers, when at Newcastle, in October, 1862, he made his famous declaration in public speech that "Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the South . . . have made a nation. . . . We may anticipate with certainty the success of the Southern States so far as regards their separation from the North. I cannot but believe that that event is as certain as any event yet future and contingent can be." No community, it was argued, numbering eight millions, as homogeneous, organized and combative as the South, inhabiting a region of the character of the Confederacy, ever yet had been overcome in a civil war; and there was no sufficient reason for supposing that the present case would prove an exception to a hitherto universal rule. All this, moreover, was so. Wherefore, then, the exception? How was it that, in the result of our civil war, human experience went for nothing?

Was, then, the unexpected really due to preponderance in force? Confederate authorities have, of late, evinced a strong disposition to insist upon this as the correct and sufficient explanation. Their contention has been discussed here very recently by our associate Colonel Livermore.¹ In order to make out even a *prima facie* showing, the Confederate authorities have assumed, or endeavored to show, that the South never, from Sumter to Appomattox, had over 600,000 men in the aggregate in arms; and these, first and last, were opposed by, as they assert, some 2,800,000 on the part of the Union. Admitting these figures to be correct of both sides, — a large admission, and one which the analysis of Colonel Livermore has effectually disposed of, — it is none the less obvious that a force six hundred thousand strong, made up of fighting material of the most approved character, wholly homogeneous, acting on the defensive, mustered for the protection of the hearthstone, is something not easily overcome. It constitutes in itself a very large army; and one more especially formidable when the minds of those composing it are to the last degree

¹ Proceedings, 2d series, vol. xviii. pp. 432-444.

embittered against an opponent whose courage, as well as capacity, they held in almost unmeasured contempt. Such a force would, under the conditions existing in 1861 and 1862, unquestionably have considered itself, and been pronounced by others, quite adequate for every purpose of Southern defence.

But this estimate of Confederate field force obviously invites criticism of another character. It calls for explanation. The Confederate historians and investigators responsible for it do not seem to realize that, in the very act of advancing it, they cast opprobrium on the community they belong to and profess to honor. If this estimate is sustained, the verdict of the historian of the future cannot be escaped. He will say that if 600,000 men were all the Confederacy, first and last, could get into the field, it is clear that the South went into the struggle in a half-hearted way, and, being in it, showed but a craven soul. No effort of the government, no inducement of pride or patriotism, sufficed to get even a moiety of its arms-bearing men into the fighting line.

Such a showing on the part of the Confederacy, if established, will certainly not compare favorably with the forty years' later record of the Boers in the very similar South African struggle. Accepting the Confederate figures as correct, how do the two cases stand? Territorially the Confederacy covered some 712,000 square miles, — a region considerably (30,000 square miles) larger than the combined European areas of Austro-Hungary, Germany, France and Italy, with Belgium, Holland and Denmark thrown in. This vast space was inhabited by five million people of European descent, with three millions of Africans who could be depended upon to produce food for those of European blood in active service. In the course of the conflict, and before admitting themselves beaten, every white male in the Confederacy between the ages of seventeen and fifty capable of bearing arms was called out. Wherever necessary to preclude evasion of military duty the writ of habeas corpus was suspended, and the labor, property and lives of all in the Confederacy were by legislation of the most drastic character put at the disposal of an energetic executive. The struggle lasted four full years; and during that period the eighth part of a generation grew up, yielding its quota of arms-bearing men. Consequently, under any recognized method of computation, the Confederacy, first and last,

contained within itself some 1,350,000 men capable of doing military duty. This result, also, is in accordance with the figures of the census of 1860.¹ During the war the Confederate army was reinforced by over 125,000 sympathizers² from the sister slave States not included in the Confederacy. The upshot of the contention thus is, out of a population of 5,600,000 whites, only 475,000 put in an appearance in response to a many-tongued and often reiterated call to arms, — a trifle in excess of one man to each twelve inhabitants. There were, moreover, more than 500,000 able-bodied negroes well adapted in every respect for all the numerous semi-military services, — such as teamsters, servants, hospital attendants and laborers on fortifications, the call for which always depletes the number present for duty of every army.³ Yet it is now maintained by Confederate authorities that all the efforts of the Richmond government, backed by every feeling of pride, patriotism, protection of the domestic roof-tree and hate of the enemy, could only induce or compel a comparatively Spartan band to turn out and strike for independence.

¹ The exact number, arithmetically computed on the census returns of 1860, but of course to a certain extent inaccurate and deceptive, was 1,356,500.

² An exact statistical statement of the number of sympathizers from Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri, who, first and last, found their way into the ranks of the Confederate army, is, of course, impossible. It has been asserted that there were 316,424 "Southern men in the Northern army." This large contingent, so far as not imaginary, would naturally have come in greatest part from the "Border States," so called. It would be not unnatural to assume that these States furnished an equal number of recruits to the Confederacy; but such an assumption would, on the basis above given, be manifestly absurd. The War Records contain lists of all military organizations of the Confederate army referred to in that publication. Including regiments, battalions and companies belonging to all branches of the service, regular and provisional, these numbered 279 from the four States, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri and Tennessee. Included in these were 238 full regiments. If these averaged, from first to last, only 600 each, they included an aggregate of 143,000 men. No less than 132 lesser organizations, battalions, and companies, and all individual enlistments, remain to be allowed for. Colonel Livermore, in view of these facts, writes me under date of October 24, 1905, "I think a larger estimate than 135,000 in the Confederate army from these States might safely be made."

³ "I propose to substitute slaves for all soldiers employed out of the ranks — on detached service, extra duty, as cooks, engineers, laborers, pioneers, or any kind of work. Such details for this little army amount to more than 10,000 men. Negroes would serve for such purposes, better than soldiers. . . . The plan is simple and quick. It puts soldiers and negroes each in his appropriate place; the one to fight, the other to work. I need not go into particulars." (Gen. J. E. Johnston to Confederate Senator L. T. Wigfall, January 4, 1864. Mrs. D. G. Wright, *A Southern Girl in '61*, pp. 168, 169.)

How was it, under very similar circumstances, with the South Africans? On Confederate showing they are a braver, a more patriotic and self-sacrificing race. Two communities, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, were engaged in a defensive struggle against Great Britain. They included within their bounds an area of 160,000 square miles,—less than a fourth of that included in the Confederacy. Their entire white population was but about 325,000, and, when the war commenced, it was estimated they could muster a force not in excess of 48,000. In countries equally defensible, the Confederates had seven whites to a square mile of territory, the Boers had two. Yet in their two years of resistance the Boers, it is computed, had 90,000 men, first and last, in actual service, or more than one in four of their population, as against the one out of twelve in the case of the Confederacy.¹ The preponderance of force opposed to the Boers was as five to one; the preponderance of force in the case of the Confederates, according to this latest estimate of their historians, was at most but four and a half to one.²

¹ To be exact, one out of each eleven and eight-tenths.

² We have census (1860) figures of the population of the States of the Confederacy at the breaking out of the Civil War; but the Confederate muster-rolls, showing actual enlistments, are confessedly defective. It is not easy to reach any accurate figures as to either the population of the two South African republics, or the number of men actually put into the field by them during the war. The "total number of officers and men of all Regular and Auxiliary [British] Forces in the South African War from the beginning to the end" is officially stated as 448,435. At the beginning of the war the Intelligence Division of the British War Office estimated the total available forces of the Transvaal at 29,917, and those of the Orange Free State at 13,104, or an aggregate of 43,021 combatants. At the close of the war, however, the total number accounted for was 72,974 Transvaal and Free State combatants, with 16,400 "Rebels," "Renegades and Foreigners," or a grand total of 89,374. The British officials content themselves with saying "it is difficult to explain the excess over the Boer official returns [preceding the conflict] unless, indeed, these purposely understated the actual strength of the burghers." (Report (1903) of "His Majesty's Commissioners appointed to Inquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa," pp. 35, 158, 168.) Excluding in each case foreign sympathizers, the two South African republics apparently put into the field as combatants one man to each four and two-tenths (4.2) of their entire population; on the claim of the Southern historians the nine States of the Confederacy put into the field one combatant to each eleven and eight-tenths (11.8) of their total white population. The relative aggregate fighting force of the Boers was to that of the British almost exactly one to five. The force of the Confederacy (600,000), as claimed by Southern authorities, to that of the Union, as stated by the same authorities (2,778,304), was about as one to four and a half.

Such an estimate is, however, as far from the mark as, were it based on actual facts, it would be discreditable to Confederate manhood. It is simply unbelievable that, measured by the proportion of fighting men to the total populations, the Boer spirit was to the spirit of the Confederacy as three is to one. The statement carries its own refutation; and the Southerners of that period were no such race of mchling, mean-spirited, stay-at-home skulkers as their self-constituted and most ill-advised annalists would apparently make them out. On the contrary, as matter of historical fact, they did both turn out in force and they fought to a finish. Undoubtedly there was, towards the close of the contest, a large desertion from the Confederate ranks. The army melted imperceptibly away. The men would not stay by the colors. When, in April, 1865, Jefferson Davis, after his flight from Richmond, met, at Greensboro', North Carolina, Joseph E. Johnston, then in command of the army confronting Sherman, a species of council was held at which the course to be pursued, in the then obviously desperate condition of affairs, was discussed. Johnston, knowing well the condition of things, and the consequent feeling among his men, when appealed to for his opinion bluntly said that the South felt it was whipped, and was tired of the war. Davis, on the other hand, was eager to continue the struggle. He insisted that in spite of the "terrible" disasters recently sustained, he would in three or four weeks have a large army in the field; and, further, expressed his confident belief that the Confederates could still win, and achieve their independence, if, as he expressed it, "our people will turn out."¹

That Davis even then honestly so thought is very probable; and, looking only to the number of fighting men on each side available for service under proper conditions, he was right. And yet under existing conditions he was altogether wrong. As respects mere numbers, it is capable of demonstration that, at the close of the struggle, the preponderance was on the side of the Confederacy, and distinctly so. The Union at that time had, it is said, a million men on its muster rolls. Possibly

¹ Alfriend, *Life of Jefferson Davis*, pp. 622-626; B. T. Johnson, *Life of Joseph E. Johnston*, p. 219; Roman, *Military Operations of General Beauregard*, vol. ii. p. 665. Roman here prints a letter, dated March 30, 1868, from J. E. Johnston to Beauregard, giving his recollections of what was said and took place at the Greensboro' meeting of April 12-13, 1861.

that number were consuming rations and drawing pay. If such was the case, acting on the offensive and deep in a vast hostile country, the Union might possibly have been able to put 500,000 men in the fighting line. On the other side, notwithstanding the heavy drain of four years of war, the fighting strength of the Confederacy at the close cannot have been less than two-thirds of its normal strength. The South should have been able to muster, on paper, 900,000 men. Such a force, or even the half of it, acting on the defensive in a region inadequately supplied with railroad facilities, — and these, such as they were, very open to attack, — should have been ample for every purpose. Texas alone had in 1860 a white population larger by nearly 100,000 than the white population of the Transvaal and Orange Free State combined in 1899.¹ Texas covered an area of 265,780 square miles, as against the 161,296 of the combined African republics; and this vast region was rendered accessible in 1861 by some 300 miles of railroad, or about one mile of railroad of most inferior construction to each 900 square miles of territory.² The character of the soil made heavy movement, slow and difficult always, at times impossible. In such a region and under such conditions, how could an invading force have been fed or transported, or kept open its lines of communication? Thus, on the face of the facts, Davis was right, and the South, if it chose to defend itself, was invincible.

And here we find ourselves face to face with one of the greatest of the many delusions in the popular conception of practical warfare. In his remark at the Greensboro' conference about the South "turning out," Jefferson Davis seems to have fallen into it. The South, at that stage of the conflict, simply could not "turn out." So doing was a physical impossibility. It was Napoleon who said that an army was like a serpent, it moves on its belly. In dealing with practical conditions in warfare, it has always to be borne in mind that an army

¹ According to the best authorities, the combined white population of the two South African states at the beginning of hostilities was approximately 323,113; the white population of Texas was returned in the census of 1860 at 421,294.

² The census of 1860 returned 307 miles of railroad in operation in Texas; in 1903 it was stated that 11,256 miles were in operation. The proportion of railroad mileage to area was, in 1860, one mile to each 865 square miles of territory; in 1903 it was one mile to each 24 square miles.

is a most complex organization; and its strength is measured and limited not by the census number of men available, but the means at hand of arming, equipping, clothing, feeding and transporting those men. Mere numbers in excess of those means constitute not strength, but an encumbrance. The supernumeraries are in the way; they not only tumble over each other, but they aggravate the shortages. It was so with the Confederate army in the last stages of the Civil War. The men were there; nor did the leaders want more just so long as they were unable to arm, clothe, feed and transport those they already had. Both Lee's army and Johnston's army melted away as the alternative to starvation. Under such circumstances, if all the men in the South had flocked to the colors it would only have made matters worse; the rations and ammunition would have given out so much the sooner. The artillery and commissariat trains could not be hauled when the horses were dead of inanition. In other words, after January, 1865, the possibility of organized resistance on the part of the Confederacy no longer existed. The choice lay between surrender and disbandment; or, as General Johnston subsequently wrote: — "We, without the means of purchasing supplies of any kind, or procuring or repairing arms, could continue this war only as robbers or guerillas."¹

The next question is, — How had this result been brought about? How did it happen that five millions of people in a country of practically unlimited extent, and one almost invulnerable to attack, were physically incapable of further organized resistance? How did they come to be so devoid of arms, food, clothing and means of transport? In other words, what is the correct answer to the query suggested by Mr. Rhodes? He certainly does not give it; but, perplexing as the question is, a plausible answer can surely at this late day at least be approximated.

Lord Bacon long ago, in some passage I well remember but have not been able now to find, compares the judgment passed on current events by foreign nations with that of posterity. We may there, as he points out, find the necessary detachment and sense of proportion; also that absence of prejudice and passion which, to some extent, makes good

¹ Johnston to Beauregard, March 30, 1868: Roman, Beauregard, vol. ii. p. 665.

deficiencies of knowledge. Turning over the pages of an English periodical lately, I came, in its issue for July, 1866, across a somewhat elaborate paper entitled "The Principles and Issues of the American Struggle."¹ Philosophizing over the outcome of the struggle rather more than a year after it had been brought to a close, the writer of the article thus answered Mr. Rhodes's query some thirty-eight years in advance of the time when Mr. Rhodes put it:—

"By dint of obstinate endurance — by dint of illimitable paper money and credit — by dint of foreign soldiers from Ireland and Germany who swarmed into the country, allured by bounties on enlistment varying from £100 to £200 sterling per head — by dint of sacrificing general after general, however brave and able, who could not gain a victory — by dint of a blockade of the sea-board, producing in due time a famine, or something very like it, through the most fertile portions of the South; and last, but by no means least, by dint of the cowardice or incapacity of the British government, that refused to unite with that of France in acknowledging the independence of the South — the Northern people conquered their Southern brethren."

Here, then, is a foreign contemporaneous explanation, and one, in some respects, close to the mark. Yet it is not wholly satisfactory. It again is too general; for, though the writer is specific enough, he generalizes in his specification, omitting nothing that suggests itself, and emphasizing everything about equally. Further elimination and a more severe analysis are necessary.

Six contributing causes are specified. Let us, through the perspective of forty years, see which still stand as material. The initial two, "obstinate endurance" and "illimitable paper dollars and credit," we may pass over. The first goes without saying; and the last would not in itself have sufficed to accomplish the end sought in 1865 any more than it had sufficed to accomplish the end then sought, when an advantage in the hands of Great Britain in the struggle that ended in 1783. The third count also cuts no considerable figure in a revised summary. The backbone of the Union army at the close of the struggle, as at its beginning, was made up of Americans. The number of foreigners, Irish or German, drawn to the country by the temptation of bounties may have

¹ Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, July, 1866, vol. c. p. 31.

been considerable ; but, as an advantage on the side of the Union, it was far more than counterbalanced by the drastic conscription enforced throughout the Confederacy. Three factors now only remain for consideration. One of these, the sacrificing of those leaders who failed to win victories, is a feature of all warfare, and in no way peculiar to our civil strife. As a factor in results it was not peculiarly in evidence there. The allusion is apparently to McClellan ; but, in his case, history, and the coming to light of historical material, have more than justified the course finally pursued by Lincoln and Stanton. Of the two remaining factors of success, — the blockade and absence of foreign intervention, — the last may be left out of consideration. It is useless to discuss historical problems from the point of view of what would have happened if something had occurred which in point of fact never did occur. On this foreign and contemporaneous judgment of conditions we are thus through elimination brought down to one factor, the blockade, as the controlling condition of Union success. In other words, that success was made possible by the undisputed naval and maritime supremacy of the North. Cut off from the outer world and all exterior sources of supply, reduced to a state of inanition by the blockade, the Confederacy was pounded to death.

Or, to put the proposition in yet another form, in the game of warfare, maritime supremacy on the part of the North — what Captain Mahan has since developed historically as the Influence of the Sea Power — even more than compensated for the military advantage of the defensive, and its interior strategic lines, enjoyed by the South. Such being the case, the greater command by one party to the conflict of men, supplies, munitions and transportation worked its natural result.

Unquestionably much could be said in support of this contention. More than plausible, it fairly explains an outcome otherwise inexplicable now, as contrary to all foreign expectation then. Without, however, going into any elaborate discussion of the arguments for and against it as a satisfactory historical postulate, but for present purposes accepting it as such, a distinct grasp and full recognition of the advantage in the struggle pertaining to the mastery of the sea is to my mind the most marked deficiency in Mr. Rhodes's treatment

of the outcome of the conflict. In this respect his narrative is lacking in a proper sense of proportion. As compared with the space devoted to the movements on land, he fails to give to the sea operations the emphasis properly belonging to them. Towards the close of that portion of his fifth volume devoted to a summary of the preceding narrative, Mr. Rhodes, it is true, does incidentally say that the "work of the United States navy was an affair of long patience unrelieved by the prospect of brilliant exploits; lacking the incitement of battle, it required discipline and character only the more. But the reward was great; for the blockade was one of the effective agencies in deciding the issue of the war."¹ This is a somewhat faint recognition of services really decisive; but, such as it is, it may pass. As one reads Mr. Rhodes's narrative, however, it would hardly be supposed that a blockade existed at all, much less that it entered into the struggle as the essential pivot on which turned many of the most important of those land movements so fully described. For instance, an undisputed maritime supremacy made possible Sherman's march to the sea.

To this general criticism, an exception must be made in the case of the action between the Monitor and the Merrimac. To that a sufficiency of space (five pages) is given; for, obviously, on its result depended McClellan's strategy. Besides being temptingly dramatic in itself, it had to be dealt with in connection with land operations. But the capture of Hatteras Inlet (August 26, 1861) and of Port Royal (November 7, 1861) are incidentally mentioned in part of a twenty-three line paragraph, though strategically they were, and subsequently proved, of the utmost consequence, distinctly foreshadowing that process of devitalization as a result of which the Confederacy ultimately collapsed. Again, the taking of New Orleans, from every point of view one of the most important events of the war as well as one of its most striking episodes, — a knife-thrust in the very vitals of the Confederacy, — is disposed of in two pages; the sinking of the Alabama by the Kearsarge is truly enough referred to "as of no moment towards terminating the war"; but its moral effect in Europe at a critical period was very memorable. Finally, to assert that the achievements of Admiral Farragut con-

¹ Vol. v. p. 399.

tributed not less than those of General Sherman to the downfall of the Confederacy may or may not be an exaggeration; but, on the part of the navy, it may safely be claimed that the running of the forts at the mouth of the Mississippi, and the consequent fall of New Orleans, was as brilliant an operation, and one as triumphantly conducted, as the march through Georgia. It struck equal dismay into the hearts of the Southern leaders. Yet the name of Farragut appears but once in the index of Mr. Rhodes's fifth volume, in which he summarizes the war; and that once is in connection with Andrew Johnson's famous "swinging-round-the-circle" performance. Twelve lines of text are devoted to the battle of Mobile Bay, while two lines only are made to suffice for the capture of Wilmington, which closed the last inlet of the Confederacy, hermetically sealing it. Here, then, from Hatteras Inlet to Fort Fisher, — between August, 1861, and January, 1865, — is a consecutive series of operations, prime factors in the final result, and they are disposed of in ninety lines of a narrative covering 1,350 pages. About a sixth of one per cent of the entire space is given to them. With Hilton Head, Hatteras Inlet, New Orleans, Hampton Roads, Mobile Bay, Wilmington and Cherbourg blazing imperishably on the record, Mr. Rhodes incidentally remarks that the work of the navy was "unrelieved by the prospect of brilliant exploits"! Nor do the names of those identified with our naval triumphs thunder in the general index. Judged by that test, six lines suffice for the allusions to Farragut, and five for those to Porter; while four solid columns are judged scarcely adequate for Grant, and two for Sherman. This, I submit, is disproportionate. In some future edition an entire chapter for each year would not be too much to devote to an account of the operations of that arm of the Union service which on the sea counterbalanced that advantage of interior lines on the land the Confederates so confidently counted upon, and of which all the military strategists or critics, whether domestic or foreign, so everlastingly wrote. Throttling the Confederacy throughout, the navy was also a spear-thrust in its back.

Passing to another topic of scarcely less importance, the sense of correct proportion is again at fault. The Confederacy did not go into the conflict unadvisedly. On the contrary, its leaders gave what at the time they considered full considera-

tion to all the factors on either side essential to success.¹ As was apparent in the outcome, they reckoned without their host; but, none the less, they did reckon. Unfortunately for it, the Southern community in the years prior to 1861 was phenomenally provincial. Judged by its literature and the published utterances of its men and women, particularly its women, it seemed — intellectually, socially, economically and physically — to be conscious only of itself. This characteristic, among many other phases of development, was inordinately and most offensively apparent in an undervaluation of its prospective opponent both for character and courage, and in an overvaluation of the importance of the South as a commercial world-power. As respects the undervaluation of the prospective opponent, the mental condition of the South in 1861 has since been very tersely stated by General Bradley T. Johnson, himself a Confederate, though born in Maryland,—at once jurist and veteran:—“The Southern people for several generations had trained themselves into a vainglorious mood toward the Northern men. They believed that they were unconquerable by the North, and that the men of the North were not their physical nor mental equals.”² And, reviewing the conflict and outcome through the vista of thirty years, this typical Southron reached a conclusion, bearing directly on the query suggested by Mr. Rhodes:—“The Confederate States were not crushed by overwhelming resources nor overpowering numbers. They were *out-thought* by the Northern men.”³ As respects the other great factor of self-deception, the overvaluation of itself by the South as a commercial world-power, the mere mention of that delusion recalls to memory the once familiar, now quite forgotten, postulate,—“Cotton is

¹ For instance, in the very matter of a blockade, as an incident to war, James H. Hammond, then in the Senate from South Carolina, in a speech delivered in 1858, and presently referred to, thus summarily dismissed the idea as an absurdity: “We have three thousand miles of continental sea-shore line so indented with bays and crowded with islands that when their shore lines are added, we have twelve thousand miles. . . . Can you hem in such a territory as that? You talk of putting up a wall of fire around eight hundred and fifty thousand square miles so situated! How absurd.” (Selections from Letters and Speeches of James H. Hammond, pp. 311, 312.)

² “Vulgar, fanatical, cheating Yankees — hypocritical, if as women they pretend to real virtue; and lying, if as men they pretend to be honest.” (W. H. Russell, My Diary North and South, chap. xix.)

³ Memoir of the Life and Public Service of Joseph E. Johnston (1891), pp. 60, 61.

King!" To the South its infatuation on this point was the fruitful mother of calamity; for the commercial supremacy of cotton, accepted as a fundamental truth, was made the basis of political action. The unquestioning faith in which that patriarchal community cherished this belief has now passed out of memory, and the statement of it savors of exaggeration. As a matter of fact it does not admit of exaggeration. For instance, what modern historical presentation could be so framed as to exceed in strength, broadness and color the following from a speech delivered in the United States Senate, March 4, 1858? James H. Hammond, representing South Carolina, then said:—

"But if there were no other reason why we should never have war, would any sane nation make war on cotton? Without firing a gun, without drawing a sword, should they make war on us we could bring the whole world to our feet. The South is perfectly competent to go on one, two, or three years without planting a seed of cotton. . . . What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years? I will not stop to depict what every one can imagine, but this is certain: England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her, save the South. No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares to make war upon it. Cotton *is* King. Until lately the Bank of England was king, but she tried to put her screws as usual, the fall before the last, upon the cotton crop, and was utterly vanquished. The last power has been conquered. Who can doubt, that has looked at recent events, that cotton is supreme?"¹

It would not be difficult to multiply almost indefinitely utterances like the above; but for the purpose in hand this one will suffice. Intensely provincial, the idea was vulgar; in the jargon of the Stock Exchange the South thought she had a corner on Cotton, and, if she so willed it, the World must walk up to her counter, and settle on any terms she saw fit to prescribe! As Russell, of the London Times, observed,— "These tall, thin, fine-faced Carolinians are great materialists. Slavery perhaps has aggravated the tendency to look at all the world through parapets of cotton-bales and rice-bags, and though more stately and less vulgar, the worshippers here are not less prostrate before the 'almighty dollar' than the Northerners."²

¹ Selections from the Letters and Speeches of James H. Hammond (New York, 1866), pp. 316, 317.

² My Diary North and South, chap. xv.

Thus, in complete provincialism and childlike faith a community was willing to venture, and actually did venture, life, fortune and sacred honor on its contempt for those composing the largest part of the community of which they were themselves but a minority, and on the soundness of a commercial theory. In regard to the extent and implicit character of the faith held on both these points no better witness could testify than Dr. William H. Russell, the once famous Times Crimean correspondent just referred to. Russell certainly had no prejudice against the South, or Southern men. On the contrary, he liked both; while he did not take kindly to the North as a whole, or to its people. He was, however, a foreign observer with a remarkable faculty for vivid description, and here to take notes and to portray things as they appeared. He was in South Carolina immediately after the bombardment of Sumter, and there mixed freely with the exponents of public sentiment. In his Diary he thus describes what he heard on the subject of Southern superiority and cotton supremacy, — he is recording what occurred at the Charleston Club on the evening of April 16, 1861, ex-governors of the State, senators, congressmen, and other prominent South Carolinians being of the company: —

“We talked long, and at last angrily, as might be between friends, of political affairs.

“I own it was a little irritating to me to hear men indulge in extravagant broad menace and rodomontade, such as came from their lips. ‘They would welcome the world in arms with hospitable hands to bloody graves.’ ‘They never could be conquered.’ ‘Creation could not do it,’ and so on. I was obliged to handle the question quietly at first — to ask them ‘if they admitted the French were a brave and warlike people!’ ‘Yes, certainly.’ ‘Do you think you could better defend yourselves against invasion than the people of France?’ ‘Well, no; but we’d make it pretty hard business for the Yankees.’ ‘Suppose the Yankees, as you call them, come with such preponderance of men and *matériel*, that they are three to your one, will you not be forced to submit?’ ‘Never.’ ‘Then either you are braver, better disciplined, more warlike than the people and soldiers of France, or you alone, of all the nations in the world, possess the means of resisting physical laws which prevail in war, as in other affairs of life.’ ‘No. The Yankees are cowardly rascals. We have proved it by kicking and cuffing them till we are tired of it; besides, we know John Bull very well. He will make a great fuss about non-interference at first, but

when he begins to want cotton he'll come off his perch.' I found this was the fixed idea everywhere. The doctrine of 'cotton is king' — to us who have not much considered the question a grievous delusion or an unmeaning babble — to them is a lively all-powerful faith without distracting heresies or schisms." ¹

The following day, Dr. Russell was one of a party on an excursion down Charleston harbor, visiting Forts Sumter and Moultrie. In the course of the trip he met, among others, L. T. Wigfall, the notorious Texan who had recently resigned a seat in the Senate of the United States to throw in his fortunes with the Confederacy. Dr. Russell says in his Diary, April 17: —

"For me there was only one circumstance which marred the pleasure of that agreeable reunion. Colonel and Senator Wigfall, who had not sobered himself by drinking deeply, in the plenitude of his exultation alluded to the assault on Senator Sumner as a type of the manner in which the Southerners would deal with the Northerners generally, and cited it as a good exemplification of the fashion in which they would bear their 'whipping.'" ²

A day or two later, Mr. Bunch, the British consul at Charleston, who not long afterwards achieved a most unhappy diplomatic notoriety, entertained Dr. Russell at dinner. It was a "small and very agreeable party," but of the talk at that table the guest recorded: —

"It was scarcely very agreeable to my host or myself to find that no considerations were believed to be of consequence in reference to Eng-

¹ My Diary North and South, chap. xiii. Later, April 19, the Times correspondent called on the Governor of the State, F. W. Pickens. Of him he wrote: — "The Governor writes very good proclamations, nevertheless, and his confidence in South Carolina is unbounded. If we stand alone, sir, we must win. They can't whip us." (*Ibid.* chap. xvi.)

² A month later Mr. Wigfall received, through his wife, from a correspondent in Providence, Rhode Island, an ardent sympathizer with the Confederacy, a warning curiously characteristic of the period, and most suggestive of the estimate in which the Northern community was then held by those impregnated with Southern ideals: —

"I think, however, that you at the South are wrong to undervalue the courage and resources of the Northern States. They are no doubt less accustomed to the use of firearms — there are very few who know how to ride, and they are less fiery in their impulses. They are less disposed to fight, but they are not cowardly where their interests are concerned and will *fight for their money*. Where their property is at stake they will not hesitate to risk their lives. . . . I would not advise you of the South to trust too much in the idea that the Northerners will not fight; for I believe they will, and their numbers are overwhelming." (Mrs. D. G. Wright, *A Southern Girl* in '61, pp. 52, 53.)

land except her material interests, and that these worthy gentlemen regarded her as a sort of appanage of their cotton kingdom. 'Why, sir, we have only to shut off your supply of cotton for a few weeks, and we can create a revolution in Great Britain. There are four millions of your people depending on us for their bread, not to speak of the many millions of dollars. No, sir, we know that England must recognize us,' &c.

"Liverpool and Manchester have obscured all Great Britain to the Southern eye. I confess the tone of my friends irritated me."

He next visited the leading merchants, bankers, and brokers:—

"In one office I saw an announcement of a company for a direct communication by steamers between a southern port and Europe. 'When do you expect that line to be opened?' I asked. 'The United States cruisers will surely interfere with it.' 'Why, I expect, sir,' replied the merchant, 'that if those miserable Yankees try to blockade us, and keep you from our cotton, you'll just send their ships to the bottom and acknowledge us. That will be before autumn, I think.' It was in vain I assured him he would be disappointed. 'Look out there,' he said, pointing to the wharf, on which were piled some cotton bales; 'there's the key will open all our ports, and put us into John Bull's strong box as well.'"

A guest shortly after on the island plantation of Mr. Trescot, he there met Edmund Rhett, a member of a family prominent in South Carolina public life. The Rhett dwelling house and plantation were on Port Royal Island, a few miles only from the smaller island on which Mr. Trescot dwelt. They thus were neighbors. The stranger and guest describes the South Carolinian as "a very intelligent and agreeable gentleman," but from his lips also came the same old story. "'Look,' he said, 'at the fellows who are sent out by Lincoln to insult foreign courts by their presence.' I said that I understood Mr. Adams and Mr. Dayton were very respectable gentlemen, but I did not receive any sympathy; in fact, a neutral who attempts to moderate the violence of either side, is very like an ice between two hot plates. Mr. Rhett is also persuaded that the Lord Chancellor sits on a cotton bale. 'You must recognize us, sir, before the end of October.'"¹

¹ This meeting was on April 28. A few days only more than six months later both the Rhetts and Mr. Trescot hurriedly abandoned their homes, imme-

As respects the outcome of what may well enough be called the South's cotton campaign, Mr. Rhodes's narrative seems to me deficient. That campaign was in fact the most far-reaching and, in world effect, the most important inaugurated and carried out by the Confederacy; and in its result they sustained complete and disastrous defeat, — a defeat which entailed on them in the midst of the contest and in presence of the enemy, an entire change of front, economical, financial and diplomatic. This nowhere appears in Mr. Rhodes's narrative; and yet on this phase of the struggle both Confederate finance and Confederate diplomacy hinged. And here again the blockade comes to the front.

Had the theory as respects the potency of cotton on which the South went into the war been sound, the blockade would have proved the Confederacy's most potent ally; for the blockade shut off from Europe its supply of cotton as it could have been shut off by no other possible agency. In so far the government of the Union played the game of the Confederacy, and played it effectively. In the early days of the struggle, they talked at Richmond of an export duty on their one great staple, and of inhibiting its outgo altogether; the blockade made any action of this nature quite unnecessary. Through the blockade the cotton-screw, so to speak, was applied to the fullest possible extent. Nor was the overthrow of the potentate brought about easily. He was well entrenched, and dethroning him entailed on the commercial world one of the most severe trials it has ever been called upon to pass through. In this phase of the struggle Lancashire was the field of central battle; and there, as the result of a struggle extending through eighteen months, the Confederate ikon was tumbled down. The catastrophe was complete; and the whole Southern programme, economical, fiscal, and, at last, strategic, where it did not utterly collapse, underwent great change. The summer of 1862 marked the crisis; before that, as Mr. Rhodes truly states,¹ the Confederate policy was to keep cotton at home, and by withholding it to compel foreign recognition; after that, the one effort was to get it to market with a view to its

diately after the bombardment and capture of the forts at Hilton Head, November 7, 1861, by the expedition under command of Captain, afterwards Admiral, Dupont. All of the South Carolina sea-islands, as they were called, were thenceforth occupied by the Union forces.

¹ Vol. v. p. 382.

conversion into ships, munitions of war and necessities of life. But Mr. Rhodes, in my judgment, disposes of this crucial Confederate defeat altogether too lightly. Mr. Rhodes says: "As we have seen, [England and France] when they could not get cotton from America, got it elsewhere." I do not know on what authority this statement is made; but it is not in accordance with the facts. In the early months of 1861 the estimated weekly consumption of cotton in Great Britain was 50,000 bales; at the close of 1862 it had fallen to 20,000 bales, inferior in weight as well as quality. Indeed so bad was the quality that its manufacture was destructive to machinery. Of this greatly reduced quantity, moreover, a considerable portion—some twenty per cent—was the American product, run through the blockade. So great was the dearth that in September, 1862, the staple, which two years before had sold in Liverpool for fourpence a pound, had gone up until it touched the unheard-of price of half a crown. Cotton simply was not forthcoming from any quarter, and the commercial world was everywhere in search of substitutes for it.

To this subject, from my point of view, Mr. Rhodes might well have devoted a chapter. As it stands, it is a case of anticlimax; introduced with a loud blast of trumpets, the potentate simply vanishes,—so to speak, he evaporates. How, and what became of him, nowhere appears. Judging by Mr. Rhodes's narrative, one would infer that it was a case of insensible dissolution; but, as an historical fact, it was very far otherwise. Not all that Mr. Hammond and others predicted, or that the Confederate leaders confidently looked to 'see happen, actually did happen; but, none the less, the process involved a commercial and industrial disturbance of the first magnitude, and the most complete and disastrous defeat sustained by the Confederacy in the whole course of the war. The episode, too, carried with it a most instructive historical lesson as to the danger even nations incur from indulging with undue confidence in a theory,—in other words, the old South furnished in 1860-61 a very striking illustration of the homely truth that the evils incident to what is humanly known as a condition of mental "cocksureness" are not confined to individuals. In 1860 that whole Southern community was socially and economically daft. But no people and no

period are exempt from such states of delusion. Within the memory of those now living this country has been subject to a dozen such; in the eyes of not a few it is to-day suffering under more than one. Fortunately, so far as deep water and destruction are concerned, the experience of the South was exceptional. It was a dream; but a dream from which the awakening must have been terribly bitter. The first indication I have found of a recurrence to common-sense was in a speech made by William L. Yancey at an impromptu reception given him in the rotunda of the St. Charles Hotel at New Orleans, on his return in March, 1862, from that wholly abortive mission to Europe on which he had been sent by Jefferson Davis a year before. He had learned something in the course of his travels, and he then significantly said: "It is an error to say that 'Cotton is King.' It is not. It is a great and influential power in commerce, but not its dictator." A little foreign travel had educated that particular Southern prophet out of some of his provincialism. Almost immediately his words found an echo in Richmond, a Louisiana Senator there sadly declaring in debate, "We have tested the powers of King Cotton and have found him to be wanting."¹ While three months later, in June, 1862, Alexander H. Stephens enunciated too late the correct principle. They had been possessed with the idea, he told them, that "cotton was a political power. There was the mistake,—it is only a commercial power."²

Passing to the other topics in the treatment of which the narrative of Mr. Rhodes, though sufficiently full, seems from my point of view open to criticism, I next refer to his account of Sherman's famous march to the sea in November, 1863, and

¹ Appleton's *Annual Cyclopædia*, 1862, p. 261, quoted by Rhodes, vol. v. p. 411.

² What is known as the alternative Confederate fiscal policy is referred to, and discussed, by Mr. Rhodes (vol. v. pp. 381, 382). There is in the appendix to Roman's *Life of Beauregard* (vol. ii. pp. 674-680) an elaborate letter on this subject written by Mr. Stephens to Beauregard in 1882, seventeen years after the close of the struggle. In the letter he quoted at length from a speech made by him at Crawfordville, Georgia, in the fall of 1862. He then said: "The great error of those who supposed that King Cotton would compel the English ministry to recognize our government and break the blockade, and who will look for the same result from the total abandonment of its culture, consists in mistaking the nature of the kingdom of the potentate. His power is commercial and financial, not political."

Grant's advance on Richmond in May, 1864. Mr. Rhodes quotes General Sherman as saying in his *Memoirs*: "Were I to express my measure of the relative importance of the March to the Sea and of that from Savannah northward, I would place the former at one and the latter at ten, or the maximum." We are then told, in a foot-note to the same page,¹ that General Schofield was of a different opinion. "Considered," he said in his *Forty-six Years* (p. 348), "as to its military results, Sherman's march cannot be regarded as more than I have stated — a grand raid. The defeat and practical destruction of Hood's army in Tennessee was what paved the way to the speedy termination of the war, which the capture of Lee by Grant fully accomplished; and the result ought to have been essentially the same as to time if Sherman's march had never been made."

On this point Mr. Rhodes expresses no opinion. He wisely leaves it for the military critics to fight it out among themselves. I can, however, say that at the time, and in Europe, this view of the relative importance of operations did not obtain. Far from it. Schofield, of course, refers to Sherman's march north from Savannah, through the Carolinas; but I gravely doubt whether his estimate of the strategic importance of that march, or Sherman's estimate of its relative importance as compared with that through Georgia, are either of them correct. While, so far as the fall of the Confederacy was concerned, both exercised great influence on the outcome, from my point of view I incline to the belief that the march through Georgia was the more potent in influence of the two. It was so for an obvious reason. In war, as in most other affairs in which mankind gets itself involved, moral effects count for a good deal; and especially is this so with somewhat volatile and excitable communities, such as that inhabiting the South unquestionably was. But, so far as Europe was concerned, it is safe to assert that no other operation of the entire war was productive of a moral effect in any way comparable with that caused by the march to the sea. Indeed, coming as it did and when it did, it is not too much to say it was an epochal event in that it marked the turning of the tide of European and especially of English opinion as respects the United States and things American.

¹. Vol. v. p. 107.

James Russell Lowell wrote a well-remembered essay "Upon a Certain Condescension in Foreigners"; and, during the earlier stages of the Civil War, this well-understood "condescension" resolved itself quite naturally into a studied tone of scorn, in no way veiled. The change which has since become so marked in this respect began with Sherman's march. That march in a way smote the foreign imagination; and the whole course of subsequent events, down to the treaty negotiated last summer at Portsmouth, has served to promote what has now developed into a revolution in tone and estimate. As every one realizes, Lowell's "foreigner" has undergone a total change; his "condescension" is of the past. The beginning of that change I had occasion to trace through the utterances of the European press. Up to the autumn of 1864, and the re-election of Lincoln, the general tone of the European and especially of the English periodicals and papers was one of exaggerated admiration for Confederate valor and leadership; while, on the other hand, the leadership and courage of the Union side were referred to with studied contumely. Sometimes, however, the contempt was equally distributed over both parties to the fray. The famous remark attributed at least to Von Moltke is still remembered, that he "did not have time to devote to the study of the combats of two armed mobs." But a much more curious and illustrative utterance was one of Charles Lever, the Irish military novelist, who, most unfortunately for himself, chose as the time and place in which to deliver himself the January Blackwood's of 1865. The paper was, of course, prepared some time before. By mere ill luck, however, it appeared in London just as Sherman put in his appearance at Savannah. In this paper Mr. Lever undertook to compare the American combatants to two inmates of a lunatic asylum playing chess. They went through moves similar to those of chess, but without the slightest comprehension of the game. He then goes on,—"Now, does not this immensely resemble what we are witnessing this moment in America? There are the two madmen engaged in a struggle, not one single rule nor maxim of which they comprehend. Moving cavalry like infantry, artillery like a wagon train, violating every principle of the game, till at length one cries Checkmate, and the other, accepting the defeat that is claimed against him, deplores his mishap, and

sets to work for another contest. . . . Just however, as I feel assured, nobody who ever played chess would have dignified with that name the strange performance of the madmen, so am I convinced that none would call this struggle a war. It is a fight — a very big fight, if you will, and a very hard fight too, but not war.”¹ There is much more to the same effect, the intensely ludicrous side of which at just that juncture the genial Irishman himself subsequently appreciated most keenly. What I have quoted will, however, suffice for the purpose of present illustration. At the very time Mr. Lever was thus rashly committing himself in cold print, General Sherman was entering on his famous march; and, while that march was in progress, the daily tone of the London newspapers was pitched in much the same key as that of Mr. Lever’s lucubration in the forthcoming number of *Blackwood*. The outcome of the move of the “Yankee” General was looked for with a contemptuous interest; it clearly was not war; a hare-brained effort, dictated probably by desperation, it could end only in disaster; most probably it was an ill-considered attempt at getting out of an impossible military situation. But one day the tidings came that the heads of Sherman’s columns had emerged on the sea-coast, that they had made short work of the forces there found to oppose them, and that Savannah had fallen. The army and the navy had struck hands! The announcement seemed absolutely to take away the breath of the foreign critics, military and journalistic. A brilliant strategic blow had been struck; an operation, the character of which could neither be ignored nor mistaken, had been triumphantly carried through to a momentous issue; the thrust—and such a thrust!—had penetrated the vitals of the Confederacy;—what next? From that moment the end was plainly foreshadowed. Europe recognized that a new power of unknown strength, but undeniable military capacity, was thenceforth to be reckoned with.

To one feature, and one feature only, in Mr. Rhodes’s account of this memorable war episode, do I care to call attention. The historian, I fear, passes somewhat gently over the pronounced vandalism which characterized Sherman’s operations

¹ Cornelius O’Dowd upon Men and Women and other Things in General: Part XII., “The Fight over the Way.” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. xcvi. pp. 57–59.

from Atlanta to Savannah, and yet more from Savannah to Raleigh. It is referred to, indeed, both generally, and, more especially, in connection with what occurred in South Carolina, reaching a climax at Columbia; but the treatment is, notwithstanding, distinctly perfunctory.¹ The other, and I very much fear, the truer and more realistic, side is portrayed in sufficient detail, and with reference to chapter and verse, in General Bradley T. Johnson's *Life of Joseph E. Johnston*.² It there appears what Sherman meant by his famous aphorism — "War is Hell." The truth is that in 1864-65 the conflict had lasted too long for the patience of the combatants, and the defence of the South had been very stubborn. The rules and limitations of civilized warfare, so far as non-combatants were concerned, were no longer observed, and Sherman's advancing army was enveloped and followed by a cloud of irresponsible stragglers, known throughout the country as "bummers," who were simply for the time being desperadoes bent on pillage and destruction, — subject to no discipline, amenable to no law. They were looked upon then by the North, weary of the war, with a half-humorous leniency; but, in reality, a band of Goths, their existence was a disgrace to the cause they professed to serve. For a Northerner it is not a pleasant admission, but the historic, if ungrateful, truth is that, as respects what are euphemistically termed the "severities" of warfare, the record made by our armies during the latter stages of the conflict will not bear comparison with that of the Army of Northern Virginia while in Pennsylvania during the Gettysburg campaign. Lee's memorable general order (No. 73) dated at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, June 27, 1863, is well known, and need not be quoted; but there was truth in the reference to those opposed to him when in it he said, "No greater disgrace could befall the army, and through

¹ "It seems probable that the inhabitants of North Carolina were better treated than had been those of the sister State. Nevertheless correction of the bad habits engendered in the soldiery by the system of foraging upon the country was only gradually accomplished and the irregular work of stragglers was not circumscribed by State boundary lines. . . . The men who followed Sherman were probably more humane generally than those in almost any European army that marched and fought before our Civil War, but any invading host in the country of the enemy is a terrible scourge. On the other hand there is considerable Southern evidence of depredations committed by Wheeler's cavalry." (Vol. v. pp. 102, 104.)

² Chapters xi., xii., xiii. pp. 119-225.

it our whole people, than the perpetration of barbarous outrages upon the unarmed and defenceless, and the wanton destruction of private property, that have marked the course of the enemy in our own country. It will be remembered that we make war only upon armed men." It was my fortune to be a participant in the Gettysburg campaign,¹ and, forty years later, I was glad when occasion offered to bear my evidence to the scope and spirit in which Lee's order was at the time observed by his followers. "I doubt if a hostile force ever advanced into an enemy's country, or fell back from it in retreat, leaving behind it less cause of hate and bitterness than did the Army of Northern Virginia in that memorable campaign."² Our own methods during the final stages of the conflict were sufficiently described by General Sheridan, when, during the Franco-Prussian War, as the guest of Bismarck, he declared against humanity in warfare, contending that the correct policy was to treat a hostile population with the utmost rigor, leaving them, as he expressed it, "nothing but their eyes to weep with over the war."³

¹ Proceedings, 2d series, vol xiii. p. 106.

² Speech at thirteenth annual dinner of the Confederate Veterans Camp of New York, at the Waldorf-Astoria, January 26, 1903; the annual Confederate commemoration of General Lee.

³ "Thursday, September 8, 1870. — The Chancellor gives a great dinner, the guests including the Hereditary Grand Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Herr Stephan, the Chief Director of the Post Office, and the three Americans. Amongst other matters mentioned at table were the various reports as to the affair at Bazeilles. The Minister said that peasants could not be permitted to take part in the defence of a position. Not being in uniform, they could not be recognized as combatants — they were able to throw away their arms unnoticed. The chances must be equal for both sides. Abeken considered that Bazeilles was hardly treated, and thought the war ought to be conducted in a more humane manner. Sheridan, to whom MacLean has translated these remarks, is of a different opinion. He considers that in war it is expedient, even from the political point of view, to treat the population with the utmost rigour also. He expressed himself roughly as follows: 'The proper strategy consists in the first place in inflicting as telling blows as possible upon the enemy's army, and then in causing the inhabitants so much suffering that they must long for peace, and force their Government to demand it. The people must be left nothing but their eyes to weep with over the war.' Somewhat heartless, it seems to me, but perhaps worthy of consideration." (Bismarck: Some Secret Pages of his History, Busch, vol. ii. p. 127.) To the same effect General Sherman subsequently declared: "I resolved to stop the game of guarding their cities, and to destroy their cities. We were determined to produce results, and now what were those results? To make every man, woman and child in the South feel that if they dared to rebel against the flag of their country they must die or submit."

The subsequent influence on the American army of General Sherman's famous

In other words, a veteran of our civil strife, General Sheridan, advocated in an enemy's country the sixteenth-century practices of Tilly, described by Schiller, and the later devastation of the Palatinate policy of Louis XIV., commemorated by Goethe. In the twenty-first century, perhaps, partisan

"War is Hell" aphorism, and its illustration in his campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas, is deserving of notice.

Lieutenant-General S. B. M. Young spoke to the same effect as General Sheridan, at Prince Bismarck's table, at a public dinner given by the New York Chamber of Commerce at the Arlington Hotel, Washington, in honor of the representatives of certain foreign commercial bodies then in America, November 13, 1902. General Young then pronounced "all the army's defamers densely ignorant of what constitutes the laws of war," and added, "To carry on war, disguise it as we may, is to be cruel, it is to kill and burn, burn and kill, and again kill and burn." If the word "humane" could be applied to war, he would define it as one "fast and furious and bloody from the beginning." He added, "When war has been decided on by our nation I agree with the German Emperor's sentiments and believe that the American army should leave such an impression that future generations would know we had been there." (N. Y. Tribune, November 14, 1902.)

The utterance of the German Emperor here referred to was his famous speech at Bremenhaven, July 27, 1900, to the first contingent of his army then embarking for China. He said: "When you meet the foe you will defeat them. No quarter will be given; no prisoners will be taken. Let all who fall into your mercy be at your mercy. Just as the Huns a thousand years ago, under the leadership of Attila, gained a reputation in virtue of which they still live in historical tradition, so may the name of Germany become known in such a manner in China that no Chinaman will ever again dare to look askance at a German."

At a court-martial convened in Manila twenty-one months after this utterance, Brigadier-General Jacob H. Smith declared that in operations conducted by him as General in command he had instructed a subordinate "not to burden himself with prisoners"; that he told him "that he wanted him to kill and burn in the interior and hostile country; and did also instruct him that 'The interior of Samar must be made a howling wilderness'; and did further instruct him that he wanted all persons killed who were capable of bearing arms and were actively engaged in hostilities against the United States; and that he did designate the age limit of ten years."

The court in this case found General Smith guilty of "conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline," and sentenced him to be admonished by the reviewing authority. The court declared itself thus lenient "in view of the undisputed evidence that the accused did not mean everything that his unexplained language implied; that his subordinates did not gather such a meaning; and that the orders were never executed in such sense." (57th Congress, 2d Session, Senate Document No. 213.)

Historically, however, it is noticeable that the instructions given by General Smith were in strict accordance with the "War is Hell" principles on which operations in a hostile country should be conducted as laid down on the occasion specified, by Lieutenant-General Sheridan, September 8, 1870, by the German Emperor, July 27, 1900, and by Lieutenant-General Young, November 13, 1902.

feeling as regards the Civil War performances having by that time ceased to exist, American investigators, no longer regardful of a victor's self-complacency, may treat the episodes of our struggle with the same even-handed and outspoken impartiality with which Englishmen now treat the revenges of the Restoration, or Frenchmen the dragonnades of the Grand Monarque. But when that time comes, the page relating to what occurred in 1864 in the valley of the Shenandoah, in Georgia, and in the Carolinas, — a page which Mr. Rhodes somewhat lightly passes over, — will probably be rewritten in characters of far more decided import.¹

¹ In his work entitled "Ohio in the War" (1868), Mr. Whitelaw Reid says of the burning of Columbia, "it was the most monstrous barbarity of the barbarous march. There is no reason to think that General Sherman knew anything of the purpose to burn the city, which had been freely talked about among the soldiers through the afternoon. But there is reason to think that he knew well enough who did it, that he never rebuked it, and made no effort to punish it. . . . He did not seek to ferret out and punish the offending parties. He did not make his army understand that he regarded this barbarity as a crime. He did not seek to repress their lawless course. On the contrary, they came to understand that the leader, whom they idolized, regarded their actions as a good joke, chuckled over them in secret, and winked at them in public. . . . In both campaigns [that from Atlanta to Savannah, and from Savannah to Goldsboro'] great bodies of men were moved over States and groups of States with the accuracy and precision of mechanism. In neither was any effort to preserve discipline apparent, save only so far as was needful for keeping up the march.

"Here, indeed, is the single stain on the brilliant record. Before his movement began, General Sherman begged permission to turn his army loose in South Carolina and devastate it. He used this permission to the full. He protested that he did not wage war on women and children. But, under the operation of his orders, the last morsel of food was taken from hundreds of destitute families, that his soldiers might feast in needless and riotous abundance. Before his eyes rose, day after day, the mournful clouds of smoke on every side, that told of old people and their grandchildren driven, in midwinter, from the only roofs there were to shelter them, by the flames which the wantonness of his soldiers had kindled. With his full knowledge and tacit approval, too great a portion of his advance resolved itself into bands of jewelry-thieves and plate-closet burglars. Yet, if a single soldier was punished for a single outrage or theft during that entire movement, we have found no mention of it in all the voluminous records of the march. He did indeed say that he 'would not *protect*' them in stealing 'women's apparel or jewelry.' But even this, with no whisper of punishment attached, he said, not in general orders, nor in approval of the findings of some righteously severe court-martial, but incidentally — in a letter to one of his officers, which never saw the light till two years after the close of the war. He rebuked no one for such outrages; the soldiers understood that they pleased him. Was not South Carolina to be properly punished?"

"This was not war. It was not even the revenge of a wrathful soldiery, for it was practised, not upon the enemy, but upon the defenceless 'feeble folk' he had left at home. There was indeed one excuse for it — an excuse which chivalric soldiers might be slow to plead. It injured the enemy — not by open fight, where

One final topic ; dealt with by Mr. Rhodes in his fourth volume rather than in the fifth, it still occupies a prominent place in his narrative, and its treatment necessarily involves a man who, first and last, for good or evil, will assuredly stand forth in history as one of Massachusetts' most conspicuous contributions to our Great Rebellion period. The topic is that Virginia campaign which made sadly memorable the spring and summer of 1864; the individual, General B. F. Butler. To my mind Mr. Rhodes has neither done justice, nor fully meted out justice, to the episode or to the man.

And, primarily, in the matter of Grant's strategy in that famous campaign. It seems to me to have been much better considered, and more creditable to him, than would be inferred from Mr. Rhodes's narrative. Mr. Rhodes then, secondarily, as I see it, fails to place where it belongs the grave responsibility for the failure of Grant's plan of campaign, with the awful loss of life that failure involved. My understanding has always been that Grant's plan assumed the active and harmonious co-operation of three distinct armies, — that of the Potomac, under General Meade ; that of the James, under General Butler ; and, finally, the Ninth Corps, 15,000 strong, under the command of General Burnside. Meade, with the Army of the Potomac, was to advance and engage Lee, holding the Confederate army of Northern Virginia fully occupied ; Burnside, meanwhile, was to be in reserve, immediately in Meade's rear ; and, while Lee was thus engaged, Butler, with the Army of the James, composed of two corps, the Tenth and Eighteenth, and in all some 35,000 to 40,000 strong, was to push forward vigorously, threatening Richmond, and jeopardizing Lee's communications. Thus an important, if not vital, part in the plan of operations depended on Butler and the Army of the James. Opposed to him, with his completely equipped and numerically formidable command, was a wholly inadequate and widely scattered force under General Beauregard, recently (April 15) assigned to that department, and not yet on the ground.¹ If by an offensive movement, intelli-

a million would have been thought full match for less than a hundred thousand, but by frightening his men about the situation of their wives and children !” (Ohio in the War, vol. i. pp. 475-479.)

¹ Beauregard was at Weldon, North Carolina, from April 22 to May 10, awaiting the development of the Union plan of campaign. He did not reach Petersburg until May 10.

gently conceived and skilfully as well as vigorously handled, the Confederate line could be broken and thrown back into Richmond, Lee's rear would be exposed, his lines of communication threatened, and he must, abandoning Richmond, have fallen back towards Lynchburg or the Carolinas. Grant then proposed to follow him up, hanging doggedly on his rear, and catch Lee between an upper and a nether mill-stone, — the Army of the James holding him in check until the Army of the Potomac, hurrying up, could force a decisive battle.

As a strategic plan this was open to criticism. Two distinct armies were to operate conjointly in wholly separate fields, with an active enemy between them, enjoying, of course, the advantage of shorter interior lines. By a rapid concentration of forces it was obvious that Lee might crush Butler, and then swiftly turn to confront Meade either from within the defences of Richmond or in the open. Not impossibly the Army of the Potomac might then be doomed to undergo, on the same ground, a repetition of its experiences of two years before. General Beauregard, it has since appeared, did indeed almost at once take in the situation from this point of view, and devised a plan of campaign accordingly.¹ Nevertheless, though involving some risk in the presence of two such commanders as Lee and Beauregard, both at once alert and vigorous, Grant's scheme of campaign was well considered and practical. He enjoyed a large numerical preponderance, and each of the three independent armies, if skilfully as well as energetically handled, was amply sufficient to take care of itself.

Had, accordingly, Grant's plan been carried out in all its parts, — south of the James as well as north of Richmond, — the terrible fighting of May and June in the Wilderness, and on the road to the James and Petersburg, would have been avoided. Richmond assuredly must have fallen; while the fate of Lee and his army would have been at least problematical. Though it is not probable that Appomattox could have been anticipated by a year, the Confederacy would have lost its capital, and Lee, with one of his two lines of communication with the Carolinas cut off, would have been confronted by the three Union armies, undepleted and combined under Grant.

¹ Roman, Beauregard, vol. ii. pp. 201, 202.

If such was Grant's plan, as I at the time and since have always understood, Mr. Rhodes gives no hint of it. He treats the campaign as if it had developed on the lines originally intended. If so, and I am right in my understanding, this does Grant great strategic injustice. His campaign failed, — failed in the beginning, and failed through the gross military incompetency of the General commanding the Army of the James.

An army could not well enter on an active campaign more auspiciously than did the Army of the Potomac in April, 1864. With full ranks, well disciplined, admirably equipped, inured to service, with confidence in itself and its commanders, it felt equal to any emergency of warfare. It was in fact a most formidable fighting machine; but, formidable as it was, the test to which it was subjected exceeded endurance. Plunging into the Wilderness, it found itself confronted by Lee at the head of the even more veteran Army of Northern Virginia, fighting on the defensive in a country peculiarly susceptible of an effective defence.¹ Mr. Rhodes has described

¹ In his Memoir of General William Farrar Smith, in the "Heroes of the Civil War Series," General James H. Wilson, both a very competent critic and one who on this subject spoke from intimate personal knowledge, attributed the ensuing failure of the campaign in greatest part to the very defective organization of the headquarters staff. For this, of course, Grant was wholly responsible. General Wilson says: "Without pausing here to recapitulate the arguments for and against the line and general plan of operations actually selected by General Grant, or to consider further his choice of subordinate commanders, it may be well to call attention to the fact that the organization and arrangements made by him for the control and co-operation of the forces in Virginia are now generally regarded by military critics as having been nearly as faulty as they could have been. . . . It was in the nature of things impossible to make either the armies or the separate army-corps work harmoniously and effectively together. The orders issued from the different headquarters were necessarily lacking in uniformity of style and expression, and failed to secure that prompt and unfailing obedience that in operations extending over so wide and difficult a field was absolutely essential, and this was entirely independent of the merits of the different generals or the peculiarities of their Chiefs of Staff and Adjutants General. The forces were too great; they were scattered too widely over the field of operations; the conditions of the roads, the width of the streams and the broken and wooded features of the battlefields were too various, and the means of transport and supply were too inadequate to permit of simultaneous and synchronous movements, even if they had been intelligently provided for, and the generals had uniformly done their best to carry them out.

"But when it is considered that Grant's own staff, although presided over by a very able man from civil life, and containing a number of zealous and experienced officers from both the regular army and the volunteers, was not organized for the arrangement of the multifarious details and combinations of the marches and battles of a great campaign, and indeed under Grant's special

what ensued. In forty days the force in Lee's front reported 55,000 casualties. Meanwhile, what had become of the Army of the James? Why did it not play its part, working a diversion? Well do I remember, at the time and on the spot, when the news came that Beauregard, with a mere handful of men, — hardly more than a heavy skirmish line, — had foiled Butler. No relief was to be looked for from that quarter. It was at this juncture that Grant characteristically remarked that "Butler was as safe as wax; bottled up at Bermuda Hundred!" But the plan of campaign then went to pieces; while Lee, relieved from all anxiety because of Richmond and his rear, with his communications assured, was left free to oppose his entire force to the enemy before him. What ensued, Mr. Rhodes has sufficiently told in a previous volume.

In the volume now under consideration, however, Mr. Rhodes deals with Benjamin F. Butler judicially, — as one standing at the bar of history. The sentence he passes upon him is severe, and the more severe because carefully restrained in expression. But it is confined to questions of mere lucre, — "beyond reasonable doubt," Mr. Rhodes says, "he [Butler] was making money [illicitly] out of his country's life struggle." That is bad; but, however bad it may be, it is in my judgment the rendering on a very minor count in the long indictment to which Massachusetts' senior Major-General of the Civil War should be made to answer. His departmental dishonesty may be measured in dollars and cents; his headquarters incompetence cost blood and grief both unmeasured and immeasurable. Who was responsible for the greater part of that awful loss of life, — a loss numerically nearly equal to the entire army Napoleon had on the field at Waterloo? Primarily, it was that commander of the Army of the James who so utterly failed in doing the work he had himself insisted should be assigned him to do;¹ and, secondarily, to the

instructions made no efforts to arrange them, it will be apparent that properly co-ordinated movements could not be counted upon. . . . In addition to the defective organization and inefficient staff arrangements which have been mentioned, neither the Union government nor the Union generals ever made provisions, or seemed to understand the necessity, for a sufficient preponderance of force, to neutralize the advantages which the Confederate armies enjoyed, when fighting on the defensive, or to render victory over them reasonably certain."

¹ Yet in his farewell order to the Army of the James of January 8, 1865, Butler boasted — "The wasted blood of my men does not stain my garments." War Records, Serial No. 96, p. 71.

commander-in-chief who left a charlatan and an incompetent in the place to which he should have designated his trustiest lieutenant.¹ It was a parallel case to that of Grouchy, — the fatal mistake of the man at the head in the choice of a tool. Years ago, during the life of our late associate John C. Ropes, I frequently discussed with him — once (1894), I remember, on the field of Waterloo — what turn other than that history has recorded might have been given to the momentous 15th of June, 1815, had Davout, instead of being at the time Minister of War and in Paris, been, as he should have been, in command of Napoleon's right wing. It hardly admits of question that the victor of Auerstadt and Eckmühl, instinctively taking in the strategic situation, would have kept in close touch with the Emperor, and that Blücher would have found the road from Wavre to Waterloo effectually blocked. Napoleon's right arm would not then have been paralyzed; he would have been free to throw his whole army on Wellington's flank and rear. Fortunately for Wellington, Grouchy, and not Davout, was that day in command of Napoleon's detached wing. Butler's command and mission in the Virginia campaign of 1864 were almost exactly similar to the command and mission of Grouchy in the Waterloo campaign of 1815; and now to discuss the operations of the Army of the Potomac in the Wilderness and at Spottsylvania without constant reference to what the Army of the James was on those days doing south of the James, is a treatment no less defective than it would be to try to explain what took place at Waterloo without giving any consideration to Grouchy's blundering march from Gembloux to Wavre. Butler, like Grouchy, was left by the commander-in-chief to act, under general instructions, as the conditions of time and place, and the movements of the enemy in his front, might make more expedient, the plan of campaign and general strategic situation being always clearly in mind. Both failed, and failed

¹ "Lastly, to put such an important operation as this under the charge of a civilian who had never made any military reputation was really an unwarrantable piece of folly. If, as Badeau says, Mr. Lincoln insisted upon it on political grounds, it would have done Mr. Lincoln no harm for General Grant to have reminded him, in distinct and not to be misunderstood speech, that the Congress of the United States had placed him, Grant, in charge of the armies of the United States for the very purpose of seeing to it that this sort of thing should not occur in the future, as it had so often in the past." (J. C. Ropes, *Papers of Military Historical Society of Massachusetts*, vol. iv. p. 369.)

utterly. In each case incalculable disaster ensued. My point is that, in the narrative of Mr. Rhodes, Butler does not figure as the Grouchy of the Wilderness.

It is obvious enough now, and, when too late, was plain enough to Grant then, that a blunder of selection entailing infinite detriment was made. In planning his campaign of 1864 Grant should have taken no chances; and it is safe to say that at no subsequent period would he have entrusted to Butler any military operations. Probably at the time he relied on General W. F. ("Baldy") Smith, assigned to the command of the Eighteenth Corps, and second in rank in the Army of the James, to supply Butler with that military guidance of which he stood in such crying need. If this was so, Grant was wrong again. Smith was then fresh from Chattanooga, where he had shown great skill immediately under Grant's eye; and perhaps no one available in the whole Union army at that time promised a more brilliant future. So high an opinion did Grant then hold of Smith that when the newly appointed Lieutenant-General came East in February, 1864, to take full charge, he brought Smith with him, with the half-formulated idea of substituting him for Meade in command of the Army of the Potomac. This idea Grant subsequently abandoned, finding a place for Smith in the Army of the James; but, unfortunately, he did not substitute him for Butler as he had proposed to do for Meade. Instead of so doing he endeavored, taking a half-way course, by indirections to work directions out. As usual, when in military operations that feat is attempted, a terrible mistake was made. Smith was, in fact, a skilful engineer; in all respects a good soldier; and, in some, a brilliant commander. But Butler, though himself a military harlequin, was a man not easy to guide; nor was "Baldy" Smith the man to guide him. On the contrary, he was almost the last of those high in rank to whom that task, at once difficult and delicate, should have been assigned.¹ A year later, General Grant would unquestionably have selected Sheridan to do the work thus hesitatingly assigned; but, in May, 1864, Sheridan had not forged to the front as he afterwards so rapidly did. None the less, just as it is curious to consider what would have been the

¹ "General Smith, whilst a very able officer, is obstinate, and is likely to condemn whatever is not suggested by himself." (Grant to Hancock, May 21, 1865.)

result in June, 1815, had Davout filled the position in Napoleon's command held by Grouchy, so we are free to philosophize to any extent we see fit over what might have happened in May and June, 1865, had Beauregard then found himself confronted by Sheridan instead of by Butler.

The recollection of events and talk of more than forty years ago was the sole basis for the statements made in the text, and the conclusions drawn therefrom. Throughout the period in question I was attached in a subordinate capacity to the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac, and was, almost of necessity, more or less familiar with operations then going on in the field, and the views generally held at and about headquarters of them, and of those who had had them in charge. But, however vivid and distinct it may be, the memory of what was asserted, or actually occurred, more than the lifetime of a generation ago is no basis for any historical statement. While revising this paper I have therefore sought to refresh my memory and verify my recollections by consulting portions of the vast mass of material put in print since 1865, especially the War Records, Grant's Personal Memoirs (1885), Butler's Book (1892), Roman's Military Operations of General Beauregard (1884), W. F. Smith's Chattanooga to Petersburg (1893), and, on the whole as illuminating as any, our late associate John C. Ropes's paper (1884) entitled Grant's Campaign in Virginia.¹ While from these authorities I have learned much I did not before know as to details, I have come across nothing affecting the general correctness of the impressions I at the time received.

Grant's original plan of combined campaign for the spring of 1864 was exactly that described. To quote his own language in his instructions to Meade, "Lee's army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes, there you will go also. Gillmore will join Butler with about 10,000 men from South Carolina. Butler can reduce his [Fortress Monroe garrison] so as to take 23,000 men into the field directly to his front. The force will be commanded by Major-General W. F. Smith. With Smith and Gillmore, Butler will seize City Point, and operate against Richmond from the south side of the river.

¹ This paper appears as Number XV. (pp. 363-405) in the volume entitled "The Wilderness Campaign," of the publications of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.

His movement will be simultaneous with yours.”¹ At the same time Grant wrote to Butler as follows:—Major-General Smith “is ordered to report to you to command the troops sent into the field from your own department. . . . The fact that Richmond is to be your objective point, and that there is to be co-operation between your force and the Army of the Potomac, must be your guide.” Butler was at once to seize City Point, and there, Grant wrote, “concentrate all your troops for the field as rapidly as you can. From City Point directions cannot be given at this time for your further movements.” Holding a firm base on the south bank of the James, Butler was thus left free to move in any direction he saw fit; and “should the enemy be forced into his intrenchments in Richmond, the Army of the Potomac would follow, and by means of transports the two armies would become a unit.”² Such were Butler’s instructions; meanwhile of Smith, who was “to command the troops sent into the field,” Grant at the same time wrote to Halleck, General Smith “is possessed of one of the clearest military heads in the army; is very practical and industrious. No man in the service is better qualified than he for our largest commands.”³ General Smith “is really one of the most efficient officers in service, readiest in expedients, and most skilful in the management of troops in action.”⁴ On the night of May 5th Butler debarked at Bermuda Hundred. The movement was a complete surprise to the Confederates. By mere chance General Hagood’s South Carolina brigade was moving by rail to Richmond, when, on the 6th of May at Walthall Junction, between Petersburg and Richmond, they encountered a brigade thrown forward by Butler to seize the railroad at that point. The Confederates “jumped off the platform cars upon which they were borne, the [Union] brigade . . . was in view, some thousand yards off, across an open field, advancing in line of battle, and supported by artillery . . . a brisk action ensued. The [Union brigade] made two direct attacks, and, after a second repulse, at nightfall withdrew.”⁵ “Thus were Peters-

¹ Grant to Meade, April 9, 1864, *Personal Memoirs*, vol. ii. p. 135.

² Grant to Butler, April 2, 1864, *Butler’s Book*, p. 630; *War Records*, Serial No. 95, p. 15.

³ Grant to Stanton, November 12, 1863, *Chattanooga to Petersburg*, p. 15.

⁴ Grant to Halleck, July 1, 1864, *ibid.* p. 29.

⁵ Roman, *Beauregard*, vol. ii. p. 552.

burg and Richmond barely saved by the opportune presence and gallant conduct of Hagood's command. It was upon that occasion that General Butler's forces were baffled and beaten off in their attempt to seize the Richmond railroad above Petersburg."¹ "The authorities at Richmond were now in a state of great excitement. The enemy had been repulsed on the Richmond railroad, and, to all appearance, had abandoned his original intention of investing Petersburg; but where he would next attempt to strike was the all-absorbing question."² At this juncture Beauregard had not yet arrived from Weldon; nor were there 3,000 men all told south of Walthall Junction, or available for the defence of Petersburg. The key to the whole military situation was unprotected. "Meanwhile troops were hastily called for from all quarters," and on the 10th Beauregard arrived, with the first body of reinforcements. The golden opportunity was rapidly passing. On the evening of the 9th Generals Gillmore and Smith, being then at Swift's Creek, about four miles north of Petersburg, united in a written communication to General Butler suggesting that the whole command should be directed on Petersburg instead of Richmond, as previously agreed. They claimed that "all the work of cutting the [rail]road, and perhaps capturing the city, can be accomplished in one day." Refusing even to consider the suggestion, General Butler, the same evening, returned a reply beginning as follows:—

"GENERALS,— While I regret an infirmity of purpose which did not permit you to state to me, when I was personally present, the suggestion which you made in your written note, but left me to go to my head-quarters under the impression that another and far different purpose was advised by you, I shall not yield to the written suggestions, which imply a change of plan made within thirty minutes after I left you. Military affairs cannot be carried on, in my judgment, with this sort of vacillation. The information I have received from the Army of the Potomac convinces me that our demonstration should be toward Richmond, and I shall in no way order a crossing of the Appomattox for the purpose suggested in your note."³

The date of this correspondence (May 9) is important. The battle of the Wilderness had been fought on May 5th and 6th, that of Spottsylvania was to begin on May 10th, and not until

¹ Roman, Beauregard, vol. ii. p. 198.

² *Ibid.* p. 199.

³ War Records, Serial No. 68, p. 35.

the 12th was the famous assault made on Lee's salient. The Confederate army was hard pressed. To what extent at just this juncture would sudden tidings of the capture of Petersburg, and the consequent severing of his line of southern sea-coast communication, have affected Lee's mind and the entire strategic situation? And it was just then that Butler, contemptuously and insolently ignoring the recommendations of his two subordinates, allowed Beauregard to establish himself at Petersburg, while the Army of the James made "a demonstration" toward Richmond! In his official report of the whole campaign Grant subsequently said of this "demonstration" that "the time thus consumed lost to us the benefit of the surprise and capture of Richmond and Petersburg, enabling, as it did, Beauregard to collect his loose forces in North and South Carolina, and bring them to the defence of those places."¹ The occasion was great, and Beauregard showed himself equal to it. Rapidly concentrating his scattered and scanty command, he, on the 15th, assumed the offensive. The next day (16th) he attacked Butler at Drewry's Bluff. "Butler's army was driven back, hemmed in, and reduced to comparative impotency, though not captured. The danger threatening Richmond was, for the time being, averted."²

At that time the Army of the Potomac was fighting at Spottsylvania fiercely and futilely, and not until June 3d, a fortnight later, did the slaughter of Cold Harbor occur. The great opportunity of May 9th, pointed out to Butler by his lieutenants, had been allowed wholly to escape; Lee's rear and communications were secure; Butler was safely "bottled up"; the Army of the Potomac, sorely crippled, had sustained losses as heavy as they were unnecessary; Grant's whole plan of campaign had gone to pieces. Had Butler on May 9th, correctly taking in the military situation, complied with the suggestion of his two corps commanders, Petersburg must have fallen into his hands; Lee would perforce have been compelled to fall back on Richmond; the Cold Harbor assaults would not have occurred; and all subsequent operations would have been other than they were.

Prior to this, May 7th, General Butler had written a

¹ War Records, Serial No. 95, p. 19.

² Roman, Beauregard, vol. ii. p. 209.

letter marked "Confidential" to Senator Wilson of Massachusetts, then on the Senate Military Committee, beginning thus: "My Dear Sir:—I must take the responsibility of asking you to bring before the Senate at once the name of General Gillmore, and have his name rejected by your body." Nominated for promotion to the rank of Major-General, the nomination of General Gillmore was then pending.¹ Under such circumstances the state of affairs in the Army of the James not unnaturally became in May so unsatisfactory that General Halleck at the request of General Grant sent (May 21st) Generals Meigs and Barnard to investigate. On the 24th they gave it as their opinion that "an officer of military experience and knowledge [should be placed] in command. . . . General Butler . . . has not experience and training to enable him to direct and control movements in battle. . . . General Butler evidently desires to retain command in the field. If his desires must be gratified, withdraw Gillmore, place Smith in command of both corps under the supreme command of Butler. . . . You will thus have a command which will be a unit, and General Butler will probably be guided by Smith, and leave to him the suggestions and practical execution of army movements ordered. Success would be more certain were Smith in command untrammelled, and General Butler remanded to the administrative duties of the departments."²

Difficulties naturally suggested themselves to the adoption of the course thus recommended. General Gillmore was relieved of his command early in June,³ and the ill-feeling between Butler and Smith culminated, June 21st, in a characteristic and extremely sharp correspondence,⁴ as a result of which General Smith requested to be relieved of the command of the Eighteenth Corps. Then followed one of the most extraordinary and inexplicable episodes of the war. Grant wrote (July 1) to Halleck, advising him of the situation. He said: "I regret the necessity of asking for a change of commanders here, but General Butler, not being a soldier by education or experience, is in the hands of his subordinates

¹ Butler's Book, pp. 644, 1065.

² War Records, Serial No. 69, p. 178.

³ Butler's Book, p. 679.

⁴ War Records, Serial No. 81, pp. 299-301; From Chattanooga to Petersburg, pp. 28, 155, 186-188.

in the execution of all orders military." Grant, however, hesitated "to recommend his [Butler's] retirement."¹ This brought out a most suggestive reply (July 3) from Halleck. In it he said: "It was foreseen from the first that you would eventually find it necessary to relieve General B. on account of his total unfitness to command in the field, and his generally quarrelsome character."² The Chief of Staff then went on to discuss the several dispositions which might be made of Butler, significantly pointing out the danger to be apprehended from "his talent at political intrigue, and his facilities for newspaper abuse." He finally suggested: "Why not leave General Butler in the local command of his department, including North Carolina, Norfolk, Fort Monroe, Yorktown, &c., and make a new army corps of the part of the Eighteenth under Smith?" The letter closed with a sentence indicative of the personal apprehension General Butler seemed to excite in the breasts of those put in any position antagonistic to him. The official Chief of Staff said: "As General Butler claims to rank me, I shall give him no orders wherever he may go, without the special direction of yourself or the Secretary of War." Three days later, July 6th, Grant wrote to Halleck: "Please obtain an order assigning the troops of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina serving in the field to the command of Maj. General W. F. Smith, and order Major General Butler, commanding department, to his head-quarters, Fortress Monroe." In accordance with this request, General Order No. 225 was at once issued. Curiously enough the original order, forwarded both to Butler and Smith,³ read that "Maj. Gen. Smith is assigned by the President to the command of the corps," etc.; in the order as formally made public the words "by the President" do not appear. This order, though in conformity with the recommendation of Generals Meigs and Barnard of six weeks before (May 24), was highly objectionable to General Butler. Immediately on receipt of it at Bermuda Hundred he rode over to the head-quarters of General Grant, and asked if "this was his act and his desire." Grant replied: "But I don't want this." Colonel Mordecai afterwards wrote: "Gen'l Butle

¹ War Records, Serial No. 81, p. 559.

² *Ibid.* p. 598.

³ Butler's Book, p. 695; From Chattanooga to Petersburg, p. 33.

returned to camp about dusk, as I recall it, and, as he dismounted from his horse, remarked to a number of his staff officers who were near him, ‘Gentlemen, the order will be revoked to-morrow.’”¹ Not only was the order revoked, but General Butler’s field command was extended so as to include the Nineteenth Corps, while General Smith was “relieved from the command of the Eighteenth Army Corps, and [directed to] proceed to New York, and await further orders.”²

As respects the details of what transpired at the interview above referred to, General James H. Wilson, whose relations at the time and subsequently were intimate with both General Grant and Smith, wrote in 1904 as follows, in that Memoir of “Baldy” Smith already referred to: —

“It must be confessed that Grant’s explanations of his later attitude towards Smith, and of the reasons for relieving him and restoring Butler to command, were neither full nor always stated in the same terms. He ignores the subject entirely in his memoirs, but it so happens that Mr. Dana, then Assistant Secretary of War, was sitting with General Grant when Butler, clad in full uniform, called at headquarters, and was admitted. Dana describes Butler as entering the General’s presence with a flushed face and a haughty air, holding out the order relieving him from command in the field, and asking: ‘General Grant, did you issue this order?’ To which Grant in a hesitating manner replied: ‘No, not in that form.’ Dana, perceiving at this point that the subject under discussion was an embarrassing one, and that the interview was likely to be unpleasant, if not stormy, at once took his leave, but the impression made upon his mind by what he saw while present was that Butler had in some measure ‘cowed’ his commanding officer. What further took place neither General Grant nor Mr. Dana has ever said. Butler’s Book, however, contains what purports to be a full account of the interview, but it is to be observed that it signally fails to recite any circumstance of an overbearing nature.”³

The disposition of commands made in Special Order No. 62, above referred to, continued in force until the Wilmington expedition and the famous powder-boat explosion of the following December. During the months intervening much had happened. July, 1864, came about during one of the most depressing, if not the most depressing, period of the whole

¹ Chattanooga to Petersburg, p. 189.

² Special Orders No. 62, July 19, 1864; Butler’s Book, p. 1087.

³ Life and Services of W. F. Smith, pp. 112, 113.

struggle. Grant's movement against Richmond and Lee's army had failed, after excessive loss of life; Sherman's movement against Atlanta had not yet succeeded; Washington was threatened from the valley of the Shenandoah; a presidential election was immediately impending; the country at large was in a state of extreme discouragement; the administration and the generals in the field stood in manifest fear of Butler's "talent for political intrigue and his facilities for newspaper abuse." Six months later the whole aspect of affairs had undergone a complete and, indeed, almost magical change. Grant, it is true, was still held in firm check before Petersburg; but Sherman had marched through Georgia and captured Savannah; Sheridan had won his victories in the valley; Lincoln had been re-elected; the Confederacy was believed to be in extremities. Under these circumstances that might safely be done which in July had seemed to involve a political risk. Accordingly, on January 4, 1865, Grant wrote to the Secretary of War: "I am constrained to request the removal of Maj. Gen. B. F. Butler from the command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. I do this with reluctance, but the good of the service requires it. In my absence General Butler necessarily commands, and there is a lack of confidence felt in his military ability, making him an unsafe commander for a large army. His administration of the affairs of his department is also objectionable."¹ Three days later (January 7) the following was issued from the War Department:—

"General Orders No. 1.

"I. By direction of the President of the United States, Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler is relieved from the command of the Department of North Carolina and Virginia. . . .

"II. Major-General Butler on being relieved will repair to Lowell, Mass., and report by letter to the Adjutant-General of the Army."

Of General Butler as a field officer in active military service General W. F. Smith wrote to General Grant, after asking to be relieved from further service in the Department of Virginia and North Carolina: "I want simply . . . to ask you how you can place a man in command of two army corps, who is as helpless as a child on the field of battle and as visionary as

¹ War Record, Serial No. 96, p. 29.

an opium-eater in council?"¹ Of the same commander, Admiral David D. Porter wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, December 29, 1864, immediately after the withdrawal of the first expedition against Wilmington, subsequently to the powder-boat fiasco of December 24: "If this temporary failure succeeds in sending General Butler into private life, it is not to be regretted."²

¹ Chattanooga to Petersburg, p. 37; War Records, Serial No. 81, p. 595.

² Butler's Book, p. 1123.





